VZCZCXRO6806
OO RUEHROV
DE RUEHJM #0597 0911459
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 011459Z APR 09
FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4562
INFO RUEHXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0171
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2937

UNCLAS JERUSALEM 000597

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND NEA/IPA, PRM FOR FRONT OFFICE AND PRM/ANE;
NSC FOR PASCUAL/PRATT; PLEASE PASS TO USAID FOR
KUNDER/MCCLOUD/BORODIN/NANDY/LAUDATO

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PTER PREL PHUM PREF EAID KWBG KPAL IS
SUBJECT: Rival Palestinian Political Factions Claim Victory In UNRWA
Staff Union Elections

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Competing statements have described UNRWA's
employee union triennial elections, for which results were released
March 25, as a "victory" for either Hamas or "the PLO." UNRWA and
Palestinian contacts maintain that candidates for employee union
offices do not run on party platforms and that the union does not
tackle political issues. In response to the political parties'
claims, UNRWA/Gaza Director John Ging sent a letter to all staff and
a separate letter to those elected to the union leadership reminding
them of their obligations to refrain from all political activity.
End Summary.

Hamas and Fatah Both Seek Political Win

¶2. (SBU) After the UNRWA staff union announced its election results
March 25, the pro-PLO bloc of candidates, running under the name
"Union for Unity," claimed victory over the pro-Hamas bloc of
candidates. Gaza-based officials for Fatah, DFLP, and the
Palestinian People's Party issued statements claiming victory over
Hamas. Gaza-based Fatah Revolutionary Council member Abu al Naja
publicly congratulated the pro-PLO candidates for winning the
election. Hamas itself claimed victory by announcing on its
official website that it had won 17 of the 27 union leadership
seats.

¶3. (SBU) UNRWA staff unions are comprised of three sector unions --
teachers, medical workers, and service providers/clerks -- overseen
by an executive committee. The pro-PLO bloc won an overall majority
in two of the three sector unions, and therefore, will control the
executive committee while the pro-Hamas bloc won a majority of votes
(63 percent of the over 10,000 votes cast) and a majority of the
teachers union, the largest part of UNRWA's work force.

UNRWA Responds to Ensure Staff Neutrality

¶4. (SBU) UNRWA/Gaza Deputy Director Christer Nordahl told RefCoord
that staff union representatives are elected as individuals and not
on a party slate. Nordahl also asserted that UNRWA employees who
express politically-affiliated positions in a public forum will be
disciplined in accordance with UNRWA's codes of conduct.

¶5. (SBU) UNRWA also provided Post with copies of two letters, sent
March 29 and 30, reminding staff that UNRWA's code of conduct
requires them to refrain from political activity of any kind.
Citing concern that this latest UNRWA staff union election was more
politically charged than past elections, in the March 29 letter to,
UNRWA/Gaza Director John Ging stated that "UNRWA staff must not be
under the influence of any political party in the conduct of their
work." In the March 30 letter, which was addressed specifically to
the employees elected to the staff union, UNRWA management reminded
staff that they "are prohibited from engaging in any political

activity which is inconsistent with or might reflect upon the
independence and impartiality required by their status" as UN
employees.

Comment

¶6. (SBU) Elections for Palestinian professional associations, civic
organizations, and unions have historically been politicized, dating
back to the pre-PA period when these were the only form of elections
allowed in the West Bank and Gaza. In this context, UNRWA staff
elections have also historically attracted the attention of the
factions. For example, Hamas claimed victory in the 2006 UNRWA
staff elections. However, there has been no noticeable impact since
then on UNRWA's programs in Gaza and UNRWA management's proactive
efforts this time are intended to keep it that way.